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ON PAGE 7

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
22 April 1980

Rip cloak off CIA's Columbia U research

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The Central Intelligence Agency apparently conducted research projects at Columbia University in the 1950s and 1960s, employing the services of university faculty and students and sometimes using supposedly independent organizations as fronts for CIA funding. In most cases the faculty and students were unaware that they were working for the intelligence agency, and that a CIA employee served as director of one of the projects.

These disclosures were culled from thousands of pages of CIA documents that were recently obtained by Columbia students under the Freedom of Information Act. They appear in a current series of articles in the Columbia Daily Spectator, the student newspaper, and paint a fuller picture of the extent of CIA covert and overt activities at the university than had previously been disclosed.

A Columbia spokesman described the recent disclosures as "interesting," and noted that in 1978 the University Senate adopted guidelines designed to prevent such clandestine use of university resources by outside groups. He would not comment on the specific allegations.

Issuance of the guidelines followed the CIA disclosure in 1977 that Columbia was one of 86 institutions where secret research in mind control techniques was conducted between 1953 and 1964. The guidelines require

that all organizations who wish to fund programs, recruit students, engage in consulting activities at the university or use the university's name must do so openly and must identify the source of their funds.

'We've taken action'

"What I'm saying is that we've taken action to deal with this kind of thing," the spokesman said yesterday.

The documents reportedly reveal:

That from 1958 to 1969 Thad Alton, a CIA employee, directed the National Incomes Project on Eastern Europe in Columbia's School of International Affairs. Financed by a \$535,000 grant from the CIA, the project involved doctoral and post-doctoral students in a study of the economic development of Eastern European countries after World War II.

In 1967, university officials publicly revealed the CIA's sponsorship of the project, but even then university officials may not have known that the project was "under agency control and headed by an agency employee," as one recently acquired CIA document indicates.

In 1957 and 1958, the CIA financed research into trends in modern scientific breakthroughs at Teachers College, an affiliate of Columbia. The agency gave \$4,000 fellowships to each of five doctoral students, who were told that the grants were from the Office of Naval Research. But the documents show that the Teachers College professor who solicited the grants knew they were from the CIA.

A sixth student involved in the project, Robert

Scidmore, was identified in the documents as a CIA employee. The project was part of a larger CIA investigation into Soviet scientific developments.

The documents show further that in 1952 the CIA used the National Science Foundation, a major research and educational organization, as a cover to channel a \$40,000 research grant to Columbia. The money was used to fund the development of a Russian-English scientific dictionary. The documents show that the dictionary was needed by the CIA to help the agency interpret Soviet scientific developments.

The CIA also paid \$3,000 to Columbia's Neuropsychiatric Institute at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital to finance a study on Hungarian refugees. The exact nature of the study was not revealed, but the money was channeled to the university through the Human Ecology Fund, an organization that has been revealed by a U.S. Senate committee as being the cover agency through which the CIA financed mind control studies in the 1950s and '60s.

The Columbia studies resulted in published books, articles and reports, none of them classified materials, although Scidmore's report on the Teachers College project became classified. But the material was helpful to the CIA in its own activities.

The articles also reveal that in 1977 a Columbia graduate, then a CIA employee, visited the campus to secretly recruit promising students to become foreign language specialists for the agency. The CIA employee talked with two department heads and received the names of three students from one of them.